



## Refugee and Asylum Mythbuster Fact Sheet

Beyond the refugee statistics and headlines are families, children and young people trying to make a life for themselves. Every day is a new challenge. Media stereotypes and political scaremongering don't help. Here we uncover common misconceptions and bust myths about young refugees and asylum seekers. Through understanding, we can help people build brighter futures.

### **“Claiming asylum is a choice”**

**Asylum is a human right and something people seek when they have no other option.**

It is not a privilege or luxury. Everyone has the right to feel safe and live free from fear. It doesn't matter how you get to that place. It doesn't matter your race or religion. It is your human right to feel protected. Under UK law a refugee is someone who has been granted legal protection by the British state after leaving their home due to fear of persecution. An asylum seeker is someone who has applied for legal protection and is waiting for an answer.

*“People will never choose to leave their family, childhood home and friends to come here and struggle. They have to do this because they want a safe life. When you have to flee your home, you want to try to make things better for you and your family. It is all a struggle and people will never understand unless they have gone through the same. The journey to leave your home is not easy - to come to another country, to learn everything again.”*

### **“Claiming asylum is easy, that's why they all head to the UK and we're full up”**

Britain is a great place to live and work but the UK has very tight immigration controls that mean that it is not the magnet for migrants that the racists would have us believe. In the European league table, Britain is right in the middle. The greatest burden when it comes to offering shelter to refugees falls on the developing world - the neighbours of conflicts and tyrannical regimes. Claiming asylum is not easy. It can take years. It's often a battle for individuals to prove they have the right to remain here and in the meantime, it's often impossible for them to think about the future, plan what comes next or move on from the trauma they've experienced.

In addition to tightly controlled immigration, the birth rate in Britain is low at around 1.7 per woman and we are all living longer. Working populations across the Western world are shrinking. The problem is that pensioners and public services will need to be supported by fewer people working and paying taxes. Skill shortages will damage our economy. The South West is the fastest growing region. Almost all of this growth comes from other parts of the UK. Devon has seen the biggest population growth.

### **“Asylum seekers are criminals and can't be trusted”**

Right-wing groups play on our fears and paint foreigners as the cause of crime in our society. The real root causes of crime are unemployment, poor housing and lack of money. It has always been the case that newcomers face the poorest conditions and become the target for criminal gangs. It is the migrant population who remain the most vulnerable to criminal exploitation.

Often, right-wing media platforms and politicians imply that people claiming asylum in the UK have an intimate knowledge of the UK's benefits system and have come here to take advantage. This isn't the case. Only a small number of refugees in Europe come to the UK and the benefits are limited. Despite not being criminals, many are treated as though they are, finding themselves in a parole-style system while they wait for settled status. They must go and report to the Home Office on a regular basis. This is known as 'immigration bail'. You go. You queue. You get stamped. You return when they tell you. It should only be for those at risk of absconding but this isn't the case. It actually makes people more afraid they will be deported and increases the risk of them going 'underground'.

## **“Asylum seekers drain our taxes, take our benefits and don’t give anything back”**

Some people think that claiming asylum is a free pass to the welfare state. It is not. It is a human right to safety and protection.

Asylum seekers in the UK get less financial support than in other European countries. They are not allowed to claim mainstream benefits. They are not permitted to work for the first 6 months. They can also be detained without trial. An adult receives less than £40 a week and is only entitled to access further help from the asylum support service which might provide basic, often poor quality housing anywhere in the UK that landlords are unable to fill with other tenants. This can further isolate already vulnerable people from any community networks or relevant organisations they really need.

Migrant workers actually give more than they take. The Home Office estimates that migrants contribute 10% more in revenue than they receive in benefits. One reason for this is that most migrants are of working age. They have finished school and are a long way from retirement. If there were no foreign-born people in Britain, taxes would need to rise by 1p for every £ or public services would need to be cut. Migrants, including asylum seekers, contribute £2.5 billion more to the economy than they take in services.

There are many examples of asylum seekers and refugees wanting both to build a life for themselves and their family and improve the lives of others. A group of young people known as the Youth-Led Commission for Separated Children (YLCSC) know how hard it is for unaccompanied and separated children to arrive in the UK alone. They are campaigning for every young person to arrive to be assigned a guardian to guide them through the asylum process safely and with support, advocating for each and every one of them.

## **“They’re taking all of our jobs and keeping wages low”**

Racist groups tend to do well when unemployment is high, but economies actually do well when the population grows. This has been the case throughout history and all over the world. Migrants often create new industries – Indian and Chinese restaurants for example. Old sectors can also be given a new lease of life – such as corner shops. They arrive with a spirit of enterprise, driven by a desire to better themselves, their families and their communities, often doing the jobs no-one else wants to do. Without migrants our building trades would collapse, our catering and tourist trades would suffer, crops would go un-harvested and daffodils unpicked; our health service would fall apart. And it’s not just that migrants do the jobs no-one else wants. Our economy and our public services rely on recruiting skills from all over the world. One in three doctors are from ethnic minority backgrounds. The Asian community has many of the world’s top computer specialists.

Right wing groups claim that employers would have to raise wages and pay more to UK residents if migrants were not employed in these roles, but a recent Home Office study found that the opposite is the case concluding that *“an increase in immigration of 1% . . . leads to a nearly 2% increase in non-migrant wage.”* Migrants tend to be better educated and qualified than white British born residents. 20% are graduates compared to 15% of the local population. The new skills bring new opportunities.

## **“We’re losing our identity”**

The fear of change is a powerful force. Racist groups claim we are losing our British way of life, our traditions and our culture.

But what does it mean to be British? Throughout its history, Britain has been built from a blend of cultures. We have always been a broad mix of races and have gained strength from outside ideas and influences. Diverse communities and workplaces strengthen our society and the economy. International trade expands as we become more confident in doing business around the world.

The South West has a poor exporting record compared to other regions. Employers here need to be more internationalist and worldly wise if the region is to compete successfully. Successful companies celebrate diversity, learn from others and take up new ideas. Inward looking, narrow thinking communities and companies become stale, dull and uncompetitive. They lose trade. The South West needs to be open-minded, inclusive, creative and dynamic.

### **Sources:**

Children’s Society  
South West TUC  
Stand Up To Racism